

Immigrant Seafood Processing Woman- Interview #11

Anonymous

27 Years old

Female

Seafood Processing

New Bedford, MA

Guatemalan (Zacualpa)

Interviewer: Corinn Williams

Transcriber: Corinn Williams

Place of interview: New Bedford, MA

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Immigrant Woman Processor Interview #11

Corinn Williams (CW): (Spanish) Ok I think we are recording now. I am going to start in English and after in Spanish.

(English) Hi this is Corinn Williams, it is May 21, 2009, and I am here to do another oral history interview with a seafood processing worker, a woman in New Bedford, but the interview will happen in Spanish.

(Spanish) Hello. I am here to listen to the story of your life if you are willing to share it. Every story is different and it helps us better understand the experiences of women that work in the fish industry and how the regulations of government and other factors affect your life and the lives of your family. This project is trying to reach people to get their stories of those whose voice are often not heard. Your story and your reality, are not well understood sometimes and given that, your voice is very important to understand the lives of immigrant women in the fishing industry and that are different from those who have lived here for a long time. In this interview your name or personal information will not be used like your address or anything, its anonymous You are aware that we are recording this interview?

I11-Yes.

CW- And that we can use this interview to measure the social impact of the regulations and for other educational purposes. And if would like to take a break at any time, just let me know.

CW: Okay, the interviews are to get to know your story. We can start off when and where were you born?

I11: I was born in El Quiche, in 1982. I am 26 or 27 years old now. I am from Guatemala.

CW: Well can you tell us what life was like over there? What memories do you have of life over there?

(2:55) I11: Well, there is a big difference because over there maybe one lives with scarce resources but you are with your family, as a woman who is married and maybe you have problems with your husband, you need a lot of support from your parents. But here you come to suffer these things and your family is far away. You long for these things and it is difficult. The change from there to here is very difficult. Because you come from there, you don't have any money, you come with debt, you have to pay for your housing, gas, electricity things you have to pay for in order to live here. So it is very hard at first.

CW: So do you come from a large family in Guatemala?

I11: We are eight brothers and sisters.

CW: Eight.

I11: But (I miss) my parents the most. Yes my brothers and sisters too but it has been six years that I have not been with my parents, I left them when I was older so I miss them a lot. But with time you forget.

CW: What do your parents do there at home?

I11: In Guatemala we sell in the market.

CW: What kind of things do you sell?

I11: We sold tortillas.

CW: tortillas?

I11: Yes, we sold tortillas. We sold that there in the market and my father has a separate shop and we lived from that .

CW: Did you live in the town or in the country?

I11: In the town.

CW: In Quiche?

I12: Yes.

CW: Is that like a city?

I11: No, I was born in the department of Quiche, but I am from a *municipio* (town).

CW: What is that called?

I11: Zacualpa. We always sold on market days on Thursday and Sunday. Sometimes during the week we would have to go fetch kindling wood, my mother has land where they cultivate bananas and fruits and she would go get them to sell in the market.

CW: Right there in the plaza?

(6:24) I11: Yes there in the plaza.

CW: Did you sell with your siblings too?

I11: Well they are little more so I would work along with my parents.

CW: So you liked selling?

I11: Oh yes, it's nice because your parents teach you how to work. That's what you know how to do over there.

CW: So did your family had a house and also land that you farmed or did they make a living from selling mostly?

I11: My father had land where he grew corn and beans. And sometimes when he didn't do it he would have other people rent land from him. Other people would farm the land and pay him for using it, things like that. That.

CW: Did you live nearby other people in a neighborhood?

I11: We lived in the town, my parents live there now.

CW: So your mother always worked in the market?

I11: Yes she still does, when I call her she tells me.

CW: Did you like working in the market and to find out what was going on in the town? What is life like as a seller at the market?

(8:28) I11: It's fun because when I grew up, I remember it was fun because during the week we would go to the woods to fetch kindling wood, it was always warm. We would go out early in the morning to get kindling wood, and come back to eat. Then you would go to school. Or when school was in the morning you would go get the wood in the afternoons then go back the next day. The next day it would be the same and the days would go by and from that you would live. You wouldn't have many things, a bed, you wouldn't be watching television or have a phone, over there it is different. But overall it was fun.

(birds chirping on the window sill)

CW: There is always a lot to do.

I11: You always have a lot to do. Maybe because I am from there, it is different here. One feels like trapped in a cage. It is very different. It is maybe because I was born there and I was accustomed to living there, maybe if I would have been born here....

CW: You were out selling in the market.

I11: Its fun, you meet a lot of people while you are selling. My father sells *cortes* (women's traditional Mayan dress) so people know my father and my mother and at church, That is how life is there.

CW: Was your family active in the church?

I11: Yes, that is how life is, it is very different, I don't know how to explain it but it is very different.

CW: Did you live far from the sea?

I11: Yes. Far from the sea. Sometimes at the end of the year we were very excited because we would get some money together to go to a little place and we would go all together with my father's family and we would rent a bus to take us to visit the beach for one or two days and they we would return. But was just once a year. Or once every two or three years. It was like that.

CW: And when you went to the beach would you eat fish?

(12:13) I11: No we would bring a lot of food with us or we would rent a big room we wouldn't sleep on beds because it is hot there and we were happy to visit there. Or maybe there would be two beds for the older people to sleep on; the kids would sleep on the floor or on a cloth on the bottom, like that. That is life over there.

CW: Did your father fish when you went to the beach?

I11: No, normally it is just the people who live close to the beach who are the fishermen. Where we are from there are more fruit sellers or merchants, In Quiche there are more *corte* merchants, apple or banana sellers, things that people eat because people who are working because we as indigenous people if we go to school or not we don't have a profession, Because over there they call them "*ladinos*" I don't know if it is correct to say that...are like you who dress in pants, or don't speak K'iche. I don't know what they call them...

CW: They say *ladinos*?

I11: Yes *ladinos* they work. But our work is as sellers, of tortillas. If they don't have time to make tortillas that is what people do for work. Sometimes there are other people who have other things to sell like vegetables, oranges or food so people come to buy what we make.

CW: So over there what was a typical day like, or a market day, what time did you start?

(14:51) I11: For a market day, we don't just sell tortillas we would sell rice pudding (arroz con leche) or things to eat like a chicken dish. Or we would kill chickens to sell to people. So you have to start the day before to clean off the chickens to get them ready,

CW: And how would you do that? It is different than here to get them at the supermarket.

I11: No, over there you wait for Fridays when they deliver chickens from the Capital to sell them. There are chickens in the town but they are raised at home. The others are raised on farms so they are a little cheaper. The home grown ones cost more and cost more to sell in the market, But when they are from the Capital you know they cost a little less and the people buy them because they cost less. So you have to wait until Fridays if not you only get the skinny ones. So you have to wait for a night and the next day and if you are making a lot you have to strangle them, that is how they do it there.

CW: So how do you do that?

I11: You have to cut the head off and take off the feathers.

CW: How do you take off the feathers?

I11: You boil some water and put the chicken in and when you feel that the feathers have softened you can peel them off and there are little hairs left on and so you burn a corn husk and pass it over the skin to burn off the little hairs left.

CW: With corn husks?

I11: With corn husks and then you wash it well and then you chop it up for example that would be on Saturday. All of that would be left prepared, it would be very clean, you would take out the guts to leave it very clean. Then in the afternoon you would put together the ingredients like chilies everything you need is chopped up. The next day you would get up at like 1 AM.

CW: At 1 AM?

(17:51) I11: At 1 AM, because most of the people over there the latest they go to bed at 9 PM. Not too many people go to bed a 10 PM, maybe other people do but you have to be careful, as women you just don't go out, only men because women could get nabbed out on the street and do something to her, so as a woman you have to be careful. So at 1 AM and there you cook the *nixtamal* (corn dough) and you go to a place that there are people who get up early for the market too where they grind the corn so you wash it. And so they would order the food from my mother and the other woman that helps her. So they leave us at home looking after the chicken that is cooking because there are a lot of them, like twenty hens. So they get the *nixtamal* because they are 2 *armoles* or 3 *armoles* which is like 30 lbs. each....

CW: pans ?

I11: They are big basins, *palnaganas* they call them there, they are made of rubber, and we put them like this (shows on top of the head) and our heads hurt sometimes.

CW: So you put them on top of your head?

I11: Sometimes, my mother would tie it on. Because it was far away, we carried it back then we prepared it on the stone, then we made tortillas and put them in baskets and then it is the morning and everything is ready to go to the market at 7 AM to sell and by 2 PM we were sold out, there was nothing left. But sometime when it would rain, not often we would eat what was left over in the evening or we would leave them overnight. Over there people don't have refrigerators, only people who have money. So we leave them cooked well to eat the next morning. And so that's how time flies by over there.

CW: Is it all women who prepare the food?

I11: Yes, women, there are a lot of women who make a living like that.

CW: And the men?

I11: Men sell clothes or shoes or they also sell sodas or smoothies, that's what men sell more of. But I have seen other men who sell French fries in little carts in the afternoons. They sell...

CW: Cut up fruit?

(21:34) I11: Yes, that too, more so watermelons in January. A lot of people sell watermelon.

CW: I imagine your family knew a lot of people from being at the market all the time?

I11: Yes over time you get to know a lot of people. Not everybody but because there are a lot of people and there are two market days and people come from all over from the villages and you always get to know people.

CW: Did your family participate in the fiestas or in the committees for the fiestas?

I11: My father is more Catholic. There are a lot of things there that is a question of religion, there are people who are Christian, Catholics and *cosumbristas* (Mayan-catholic syncretism organizes traditional fiestas). The *costumbristas* are more inclined to worship the powers of nature, also all of us who are from there you are raised that you should not throw corn away or you don't throw a tortilla in the garbage or food that is left over you don't throw it out in the garbage it is a sin. Some people have food and others don't. Those are like the customs of the people from before and as Christianity came in, you had to have respect. If you see an elderly person on the street you can't push them aside you have to give them the right of way. Now a lot of things have changed but when I grew up I saw that people had more respect. Corn, beans or food you didn't throw away.

CW: But what you do with food you don't want to eat?

(24:19) I11: If you don't want to eat it you shouldn't take it. You should never throw it away. Over there people have, do you know what pigs are? So the people have those and they set the food aside.

CW: Or you put it back on the land?

I11: Yes, my parents since you asked me about religion, my father regarding the fiestas, he is part of Catholic groups, like when there are fiestas for the Virgin (Mary) or for Thanksgiving yes he gets involved. But if it is just a fiesta to get drunk, things like that, then no. But yes there are a lot of fiestas there. Each one is organized differently. And so my father was in the Catholic ones but there are also ones by the *costumbrista* believers and you have to respect them because we all have our way of doing things.

CW: But are there a lot of fiestas?

I11: Yes I think there is going to be a fiesta this week or next week.

CW: So there are a lot of women who are very active in commerce-do they have any power in the town?

(26:15) I11: No over there for the same necessity, the people who govern the town are all men. I think it is because women are working and doing things to sell their things. Sometimes you might see a woman on the street with two or three chickens by her side waiting for someone to buy them. For the same necessity, some husbands work, but there is still a lot of *machismo* and although a man works, women don't have an education, they can only be housewives and take care of children, but if there is a need and they don't have money. Over there only those who go to school might have money so if not, you have to see where you can earn some money. If you have an orange tree at your house you pick them all and bring them to the market to sell them because maybe the kids want some sweets or other things. That is why. That is why my mother sells in the market she says "If I don't help your father with the household expenses because what he earns isn't enough" so she says she has to help my father to earn a little money selling this and that. And that's how it helped us because if it was just my father and he would get mad if we just asked him for money. That is what my mother would discuss with us. And that is why women also suffer; they might have a husband who drinks too much. (For some men) women are only women and good for nothing, and that is why a lot of women weave or do anything to make a little money.

CW: Are there a lot of women who weave in Zacualpa?

I11: Yes I think so, where we (work) sell there are some women who weave.

CW: Do you know how to weave?

I11: My mother knows how. But me, the only thing I know how to do is eat (laughs). No my mother knows how it do it, when I was little she would weave but later she found another way of making a living so I learned how to make things to eat.

CW: So you were living there and how did you find out about the United States? Did you meet people who had been there?

(29:53) I11: Yes, there are a lot of people there who have their husbands who have come here and then later send for their wives. Over there if you have money it only lasts you for the week, you spend it just to survive. You can't accumulate any money like 20,000 or 30,000 (Quetzals). Over here maybe if you have a good job, and you work 40 hours a week for \$8.00 an hour and you earn \$300, what helps is the exchange rate, so we make a lot of money here. So when you see people over there I would say to my mother "Mommy why do those people have such a pretty house, why don't we have things?" The people who leave from there and come here come back and have cars, they live better. They have big shops like you see here called mini-markets. They have stores like that. And I would say to my mother "Why don't we have these things and we work so hard?" And those people come back in a year or two and have all this. That is how one becomes curious and wanting to come here. One says "I'm going there to earn some money."

CW: How is it that you thought to come here?

I11: I thought about it when I was 16 or 17 years old. My brother was already over here.

CW: Here in New Bedford?

I11: Yes, so I asked him if I could come but he said "No you can't just come to lose your way." He said it in the sense that maybe I would become a single mother here. He said "No, if you are to come you have to have a husband to bring with you. But if you come alone I don't want to be responsible for children." So I didn't come.

CW: Why did he tell you like that?

I11: Because for the people in Guatemala it isn't accepted to see a woman having children without a father. It's very -gasp!

CW: A scandal.

I12:A scandal.

CW: Why?

(33:07) I11: Because it's the mentality of the people, here it is different. I see a lot of women who are single and they have their kids and they are getting ahead or they have another husband. But over there no, when you get married you can't go out again. When you are a young girl you can't just go out with one boy than another and another. If your parents find out

you are talking to someone, he has to ask permission from the parents or they are not allowed to go out with someone. That's what happened to me, when I met him (future husband) he was talking to me. Quickly people told my parents this and that and to avoid future problems to be left with children....because over there the economy is such that you can't have more kids in the house to support. At least it was that way at my house my father didn't want the burden of another child. So parents see this and they tell you "you are free to get married but in order to get married you have to be sure about what you are doing, because when you get married you can't go with another man. So if you are getting married it is for your whole life." Because my father is Catholic, he said "You have to get married in front of God." That is the advice you are given and so the things you might be doing hidden from them is bad so when you have a boyfriend he has to ask permission and talk to the girl's parents to get married. And the parents of both arrange things between them.

CW: And what happened in your case, how did you meet your husband?

I11: I met him when he was working in my town, he is from another town and he came to work there.

CW: Is he from Quiche?

I11: Yes, from Quiche from a nearby town. He came to work and he met me and asked if I accepted to be his boyfriend and when I was seen talking to him people told my parents. Then my parents confronted me to tell them if it was true, and so there you have to have not fear but respect for your parents and do what they say. So they said "if it is true tell him to bring his mother to the house to find out if he is not lying, tell him to bring his mother and father and then we will talk about it here." So his parents came and they talks and came to an agreement that they would allow him to come to the house to talk to me, but not to come in.

CW: Just to talk?

(36:34) I11: To talk and because he was from another town he had to find another place to sleep at night. So it was like that for about a year.

CW: How old were you?

I11: I was 21. I was 20 when we met and for a year he would come by then he asked permission to get married to me. So we got married in the church, and so they left gifts for the parents to demonstrate that the children ... like if you have a daughter then the boy has to give something to you like food.

CW: Are they special foods?

I11: Depends- it could be a chicken that is already cooked; they bring bread, whatever they can bring. There are some families that ask for many baskets of bread. But my father said that "if he asks for a lot, (the groom) will spend a lot of money and it is my daughter who will be living with

him after all and she will suffer if there isn't enough money and I will be happy eating and she will be suffering, so if you want to give me something, give me something, but if not leave it at that. " "So children are like that and they leave home in time and you know that and that is what comes with being a parent" he would tell me. So we got married and then we decided to come here.

CW: The two of you?

I11: Yes, we got married in December, and in January we came here.

CW: So you had your honeymoon here.

I11: (laughs) We had our honeymoon on the road!

CW: And what had you thought about the United States at that time?

(39:14) I11: One thinks from what you see over there you think that you come and climb a tree and cut off the money. No, we got married and we came and we didn't have money and we had to borrow money. Because there was the two of us, and first we prayed to God to help us, praying to God because he is the only one to help you. And we arrived.

CW: What was the trip like?

I11: The trip for us maybe was not too difficult it took only a week. We left on a Saturday and on a Sunday we were here already. It was easy for us but they also charged us a lot, we didn't know better.

CW: How much did they charge?

I11: Like \$7,000 for each of us.

CW: \$7,000 Quetzals?

I11: \$7,000 dollars, over there we paid part of it. He paid 33,000 Quetzals and me that was 66,000 Quetzals. In dollars that is like \$3,000. So from Guatemala to Mexico it cost 33,000 Quetzals for each, one and one, 66 for both. In dollars it is \$6,000. When you get to Mexico, at the border with the United States the people who brought us asked for \$2,500 for him and \$2,500 for me. It was \$5,000 more. So when we crossed we didn't have any money and we had to call the person who helped that we needed bus fare to get here. They left us at a bus station.

CW: At the border?

(41:55) I11: At the border, they told them at the bus station that we were picked up by immigration and that we were given permission to travel here. So they left us here and we didn't have any money. So the person who helped us had to send us money for the bus fare so then our debts continued to increase.

(her little girl who was sleeping wakes up)

CW: So you had to borrow from a family member?

I11: Yes, the brother I told you about.

CW: Because he was already here?

I11: So when we arrived we had to come here (to New Bedford). We were in San Antonio and they speak Spanish there so the person who sold us the bus ticket, I don't remember how much it cost but it had a lot of parts to the tickets that we paid from San Antonio to Providence, Rhode Island? But when we got to New York, and the bus station is very big there, we didn't know where to go until a man told us "there is the gate where you are going." Because we didn't know where we were going we were waiting and waiting until midnight and we were asking and asking but nobody spoke Spanish, but another person came and did us the favor to explain that the buses to Providence wouldn't be leaving until the next day because it was snowing a lot and they couldn't leave, but there was a bus leaving for Boston and that was close by and so we called my family member and he said "come and we will come and get you. Just call us when you get to Boston." And so we went quickly to buy the ticket and the window was almost closing it was midnight, so we left New York and we didn't know where we were going but we took turns sleeping, he would sleep a bit then I would sleep so we wouldn't get lost. We arrived in Boston and my brother was afraid so he went to Boston to wait for us. And that is how we arrived. When I saw my brother I didn't recognize him, I thought "who is that Chinese man with a beard?"

CW: Had it been a long time since you hadn't seen him?

(45:33) I11: Yes, it was about 10 years. When I was small I thought he was so big, But because I grew, he was now my same size. He was short and badly dressed, he looked like a bum! (laughs) He was wearing a typical Guatemalan jacket and that is how I knew it was him but if not I wouldn't have recognized him. He looked so different, his hair was very long, we had pictures of him in Guatemala but he had short hair and without a beard. In contrast now he had a beard and his eyes were very slanted (Chinos) so I didn't recognize him. And so we arrived here.

CW: What did you think when you arrived?

I11: I don't know like I said, one leaves from there and really doesn't think about it, you just know that you are coming to work but you really don't know what you would be doing for work.

CW: Did you like it, or was it too cold, or grim?

I11: At first it was a nightmare.

CW: A nightmare?

(47:03) I11: A nightmare because imagine, over there its warm and to come here in the cold. And when we came we had more debt because we had to see about renting a room to live in. There was no room where my brother lived, he helped us with food but he didn't have a place for us to live and we had to borrow more from him.

CW: Where did you find an apartment?

I11: Right in the same place and because we were a couple he asked around and found a little room for us. We arrived at the end of the month so we were able to get a place right away at the beginning of the month on the third floor in a tiny room.

CW: With other people?

I11: Just with another guy. We had to pay \$450 and you had to leave a security deposit, we had to borrow more and more money. And since my brother worked in the fish house, so we rested a week and he found a job for us and we started working. The first day....(sighs) no....

CW: You didn't like it? What was that first day like?

I11: The first day we started at 7 AM. When I got there my brother said "you have to use this, this and this."Well, I put on the jacket. I put on the sleeves. I put on the gloves. After they gave me an apron and because I had the gloves on and I wasn't used to wearing them, I couldn't even tie my apron. When we went into the plant I didn't know what to do with myself-we were like chickens with our heads cut off (Guatemalan phrase: like a just bought chicken). And the other workers were just staring at is because when you come from Guatemala your skin is very dark and malnourished, now I normally weigh 130 lbs. but when I arrived I weighed 110 lbs., I was very skinny!

CW: From the trip.

I11: The other workers looked at me strange . There was a woman who knew me in Guatemala and asked me "are you so and so"? "Yes" I said. Gasp! My brother said "you are so black!"People look different here.

CW: So did you know a lot of people from back in Guatemala?

(50:08) I11: By sight, yes a lot of people. But here it is difficult to see many people, you might see people at work or run into people at a store, over time you get to know people here but it is hard it takes time. You might run into someone at a store but not everyone goes to the same store at the same time. So we started to work, it was very cold! I felt the cold right through my bones when I started working there.

CW: So you couldn't warm up?

I11: There I regretted it so much. I thought I should have never come here, I was so sad. And it was wintertime, you live inside all the time, and with such sadness, Oh my God. The change is

very hard. And after I became pregnant with my daughter, and people would frighten me to say that I would be getting in to more debt, that or would cost another \$8,000 to have the baby in the hospital, and I already owed \$7,000 and \$8,000 on top of that, the thought came into my head: "what you have to do is get your passport and get out of here." A lot of people told me to go back. And I thought "where am I going to get \$7,000?" That's almost, let me see, 60,000 quetzals in Guatemala, \$7,000. So I started working and working, and before there was a lot of work, I never even came home I was just working. I would start working at the fish house at 6:30 AM, when there was a lot of work 6 or 7 years ago, I never stopped. I would leave that job and I went to another job. I had another job on the weekends at a bakery in Wareham. That is what I did. (child is sleeping in the background)

CW: You had two jobs and you were pregnant?

I11: Yes. I was pregnant too because when I was pregnant on a Wednesday I had an appointment with the doctor, and she provoked me a little because she was checking if the baby was alright, she checked me with a thing on my insides and I felt a very strong pain and I started to bleed and the next day I went into labor. So Wednesday I went to work, Thursday I went to work, but on Friday she was born. I had a lot of debt and I had to see, but they told me at work that I couldn't go back to work because I could fall and it was slippery. So I was sent to work in places where I didn't have to move much. It was hard, I remember those times-no...

CW: Where was your first job? What kind of work were you doing in seafood processing?

(54:02) I11: Cleaning fish. And that is what I continue to do, cleaning fish.

CW: Always at the same company?

I11: Yes. Yes at the same company. I have wanted to work at the Bianco factory. I applied but because I didn't know how to run a (sewing) machine I was never chosen to work there. I have always had the desire to get another job but one doesn't find it. So the only jobs are in fish processing. It is the only alternative. Who would really like working with fish? No one.

CW: What don't you like about it?

I11: Oh, all the time its cold, at the same time you suffer and at the same time you don't earn much. Sometime I compare it to people who say "Look, I work at a place where we are just folding clothes and it is hot there" they say "it is hot but we have air conditioning." Or they say "if it is cold we have heat."(laughs) But one suffers with the cold, the wind or the machines that process fish blows out air and one has to... I worked in other companies and it is very different than working in fish processing, I feel that working with fish is maybe bad to think this way. Many people say "you don't eat where you defecate." But sometimes it is hard to talk about where you eat to speak about the good things it is difficult. But because you have no choice you have to deal with it. You just have to deal with it. It's difficult because I have been at other companies that where the work was easier, the fatigue was less. Sometimes when there was not

much work I would try to find another place to work for a day or two. I would leave this job and go to another place if there was a week when there was no work, I would go to another company. I saw that the people working in scallops for example, it was easier. When I went to work in scallops I was afraid so I was working so fast I didn't want to stop. And I saw that the people wouldn't be doing much and they would be walking around and nobody would say anything to them and they were not afraid.

CW: But in the fish plants?

(57:22) I11: At the fish plants you can't stop for a bit. You can't linger, as women we have our periods- "the greatest days of the month" (laughs). And if you are in the bathroom too long they stare at you or they say "you can't stay in the bathroom so long, you only have this many minutes." And you don't do this to cause a problem, I understand that some people who do, but one tries to do their best. (The job) has given me a way to eat (survive), but it is difficult. It is difficult because like I tell the other women I work with "you don't know if it is summer, it is cold all the time." And because of that the winter is the worst for us because it is not just cold outside, but it is cold inside. You are in the cold all the time and you get sick too. I tell my husband "when I go back to Guatemala when I am 50 years old I will look like I am 70, I'll be all wrinkled from the cold I came to suffer over here." You feel cramps in your bones and hands from the cold.

CW: How many years have you been working in fish processing?

I11: Since I arrived in 2005.

CW: Four years already.

I11(Four years) in January .

CW: Do you just live with your family at the house now?

I11: There are other people who live with us because you don't have that luxury .

CW: Do you have only your brother who lives here?

I11: Yes, but he lives with his girlfriend now, so he has his own family. So we don't live with him.

CW: Does your husband have family here?

(1:00:03) I11: I don't think so. He has friends in Florida but they are just friends. Maybe he has a cousin but I don't know he hasn't told me. But he has friends who call him from Florida but not family.

CW: Do you have friends at work?

I11: Good, good friends no, only acquaintances. At home they taught me that to have good friends (of flesh and nail- *de carne y uñas*) sometimes it's not good. We talk, but they are not

deep relationships. It's not like "let's go out to eat." When you get married you can't have these (kinds of) friendships. You can't just say "let's go here or there." I don't think so. I have acquaintances, we talk for a while.

CW: Are they Guatemalan women?

I11: Yes they are Guatemalan but others are Cape Verdean . They are the only ones who are friendly, the Cape Verdean women. I have acquaintances that come from my town too. But good, good friends who come and visit me, no, only acquaintances.

CW: How do you celebrate holidays like Christmas?

I11: At Christmas we try to get together with my brother, my husband and the people who live at the house to make *tamales*. We go to Mass or sometimes we go with the church to Connecticut to celebrate with other people from Guatemala. We eat hot *tamales* that's it.

CW: So before you used to wear traditional Guatemalan clothes?

I11: Yes, over there. I have these clothes here but sometimes I am ashamed to wear it if someone would say something to you about it.

CW: But that is what you wore all the time over there, right?

I11: Yes, my whole life when I was living there. The bad thing is that one gets used to wearing the clothes over here. Over there you use something to hold up your *corte* (skirt), a belt. But here I don't use a belt and I feel free. But now when I put on a belt I feel very constricted. (laughs) Your body gets used to these things. Once and a while I put it on (the traditional dress) when I go to church. A lot of people wear it when they go to church.

CW: It's a big difference, you can't go to work in fish processing in traditional *corte*.

(1:03:38) I11: But some women go to work wearing their *corte* and then they change. I saw a woman who used to work at my job but now she is no longer there. She used to come to work in her *corte* and they would mistreat her and say things to her but she didn't care "These are my clothes and why should you care" she would say. So she would come in and quickly change and go to work and after she would change back into her *corte*.

CW: But she wouldn't go to work in them?

I11: No but yes she would wear this to work. Sometimes you don't feel shame, but that people are staring at you so you feel uncomfortable. Not like when everyone is dressed this way and you feel comfortable.

CW: It's not like over there (in Guatemala) where all the women dress this way?

I11: In contrast to here (when you wear it) it is like calling attention to yourself. But sometimes you wear it, when it is a situation where are lot of people who are wearing it. But when you are

the only one and others are not you don't dare to or you may be seen as very bold. But when one goes back to Guatemala then you know you have to wear it all the time. You know that is what you have to do.

CW: Did you wear other clothes over there or do you have to wear traditional dress every day?

I11: One has a lot of traditional clothes, you might have 5 different sets of traditional clothes, but it depends on how much money you have.

CW: And your father sells these clothes?

I11: Yes he sells them but sometimes it's not so easy that he would give you clothes. I would say "I don't have any clothes to wear" and he would say "yes you do, you need to wear what you have until it is torn then I will give you another (outfit)." (laughs)

CW: Do you call your family?

(1:06:02) I11: Yes, every week or every four or five days. I always call them because I miss them a lot. When I talk to my mother, mostly. She tells me about selling at the market she tells me what is going on, she is like my best friend. Sometimes when I hear her voice, I cry and she sometimes cries. We send cassettes to each other, when we record something we both cry because we miss each other very much.

CW: Would you have preferred to stay there, knowing what you know now?

I11: Like I said, we had just gotten married, and we didn't have anything, We would dream of having a little house or to have something to live a little better, not to live a life of a rich person but to live "what God commands" as they say, that was our minds when we came here. Maybe if we get a little money together, but based on all the sacrifices, having to leave your parents, they get sick sometimes and you are not with them. Sometimes I pray to God I say "Lord, don't let anything bad happen to my parents while I am here." If something were to happen or one of my parents died while I was here and I was unable to see or help them... I know they will die one day but I ask God to let me go and be with them, to see them and to go live with them. Because it is hard to be here to hear that "we already buried your father or we already buried your mother" that's so hard and I have heard of cases like this here. You have it in mind that your parents are still alive, but this scares me so much. And that is why I think maybe we will stay just one or two more years here and I will go back. I still want to go back.

CW: And you don't know with the situation here.

(1:09:03) I11: That too- you are not safe here.

CW: But if there were a way to get your papers?

I11: Well, who wouldn't want that, that would be great because you could go to travel to see your parents when you wanted.

CW: go on a vacation there.

I11: You could go and then come back here again to work. Yes it would be great. Let's see what happens and if not we have to go back anyway.

CW: So getting back to the topic of fish and work, have anyone ever spoken to you about the fishing regulations? For example you mentioned that there was work today but yesterday there was no work, so there are days there is no work, so how is work?

I11: Well the way it is now, there is very little work. They only pick a few people to work, maybe based on the kind of work they do and they are given work and the majority of the rest of them are laid off.

CW: How many people work there?

I11: There is 40 to 50 I believe. I'm not sure, like between 40 to 50.

CW: Do you work directly for the company or for a temp company?

I11: No, for a temp company. All of us who are immigrants work for a temp company.

CW: And your husband too? He has a permanent job but does he also work for a temp company?

I11: Yes .

CW: So do you have to call in to find out if there is work?

I12: Well (where I work) we go there every day. You ask your boss (the day before) if there is work the next day, and if he says "no there is no work until such and such day, come back at this given time." That is how they tell you. It is not that they call you your boss tells you although you work for a temp company, it is the boss at the plant who tells you (to report for work).

(little girl is snoring loudly)

CW- We are listening to your daughter who is snoring loudly, (I11 tries to wake her) no, no its alright. (daughter cries) Poor girl, she is very tired.

CW: So now work is very slow?

(1:12:20) I11: Yes, there are very few hours.

CW: So with both of you working, who manages the money in the house?

I11: In the beginning there was a divide between us, as every couple starting out, there are many problems.

CW: So you kept your money apart from what he earned?

I1: Yes, in the beginning it was like that, but later we saw that it we were better off putting the money together. And now we have our daughter, so now there are expenses we both have to cover so I may pay or he may pay, and the little left over we send it to Guatemala in his name to save.

CW: Is he helping out his family over there?

I12: Yes, that is why we couldn't figure out at first how to handle the money. He sends money (to his family) and because he is a son, his parents ask more of him, because he is a man. My parents don't ask me for anything they say "Not it's your money, you worked a lot for us."

CW- So they don't ask you for money.

I11: They don't ask me, so I save it. So when he (my husband) is broke, I need to help him. And when we had our money separate, he had to borrow money from other people, while I was living a happy life! (laughs)

CW: You had put your own money away.

I11: So that is how we decided to share our money but it was hard to learn how to. Now we share the expenses and what is left we save, and one day we might be able to buy a little piece of land or for our children. (tries to quiet snoring daughter)

CW: So they have never spoken to you at work about the regulations or anything like that?

(1:15:14) I11: At the company they have nothing to do with you. The only person is the man who contracts us from the temp company, who has talks with us about how you should not use earrings because they could get into the product. You shouldn't paint your nails, they told us about rules like this. But other kinds of regulations no, just rules like you can't eat at your work station, general health and safety rules. Things like that.

CW: Is your job a little dangerous, are there accidents or do people slip?

I11: Its dangerous everywhere at the plant, water spills and the fish is always slippery. You have to look out to not fall down; you have to watch out for yourself, if not who will?

CW: Are your supervisors calm or do they rush you at work?

I11: Before, one of the owners of the company was there and he used to say bad words at us, as people referred to it. But he is not there anymore. But there was a time when if you would just look at him, the devil would come out, you would be afraid of him even if you weren't doing anything, but he would be walking around looking to fault you. If he saw you standing around for a little bit, or if you cut off too much meat when you were cleaning the fish he would mistreat you with words in English, but Thank God he is not there anymore. But he was one of the owners and there are a lot of owners and there was another one who was very angry and he mistreated the people. And because we are very small and very humble people, he would scare

all of us! But for the necessity we had to take it. Sometimes we wouldn't understand (what they were saying about us) but we would have to swallow it and keep it in our hearts.

CW: You would feel bad but you couldn't say anything.

(1:18:20) I11: Yes, but he is not there anymore. One day when he was working a block of fish fell on him and he fell down when he was rushing us and when the block of fish fell on him he quieted down. I think that when he was telling us to hurry up, they sometimes don't want to lose even five minutes because it is a great loss for them, so he started to work with us and he put the block of fish in the wrong way and when he was bent over (to pick it up) it slipped out of his hands and he fell over.

CW: So that calmed him down a bit.

I11: After that he worked a little while longer but soon after we never saw him again there. But all of the workers were afraid of him. As I said, one puts it in their mind that you came here to work, and you have it in mind that you have a job and it doesn't matter if you are mistreated or humiliated, it hurts but in the end you swallow it. You put up with it thinking, "I came here to work for 2 or 3 years and then I'm going back". That's what we put in our heads to not feel bad.

CW: Do you think you will stay here or are you thinking of going back, or don't you know yet?

I11: We are thinking of going back, but if there is an opportunity to (adjust immigration status) with the new President (Obama), many people have hope for him, but it depends, if there is nothing, and if work keeps slowing down, one won't be able to support oneself here. Instead of saving money you could go into debt in dollars, time will tell.

CW: Overall, has the experience of working in fish processing been something positive or negative?

(1:21:01) I11: Perhaps not.... It has supported us during the time we have been here. But it is hard. It is not a job that you say "what a great job I have", or something to feel proud about. Instead people have the idea in their head that it is the worst job to have. It is not a pleasant job. Everyone says "where do you work?" "In fish processing" "Ugh!" they always say. When we compare jobs we say, "Yes it is the worst, but where else am I going to get another job? "I don't know where." One stays working there out of necessity.

CW: Did you try to find a job elsewhere?

I12: Yes, I have tried and maybe all I could get a just part-time job, things like that are just seasonal too. So that is why I am the fish processing place because I have nowhere else.

CW: Well we talked about a lot of things and I don't know if there is any other topic you would like to mention?

I11: I don't believe so.

CW: Thanks very much, your poor daughter is sound asleep.

I11: No thank you for all your help too with our taxes, it is a big help. (she had come to the office for our free tax preparation program) At other offices we are charged as much as the little refund we get back.

CW: Over time you can learn how to file every year.

I11: Thanks.

CW: Thanks to you!

(End 1:23:26)